

Walking Meditation

A Practical Bare-bones Guide to Walking Meditation

by Sasana Dipika Sister Khema September 7, 2012

“...When we practice Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) we consider the WALKING MEDITATION as being the first step for integrating Buddhist practice into the motion of everyday life...” BV

STEP INTO LIFE

Within the practice of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, whether you are practicing Metta, Breathing, or Forgiveness Meditation, the Walking meditation must accompany the practice to properly develop.

It is used to get the blood flowing, keep the body healthy, and especially to help protect the legs from getting sore in a wrong way where blood clots can develop. It helps us keep us keep our energy level up and slows down any sloth and torpor arising.

The walking meditation is our first move towards taking the practice home. Look at walking as carrying your practice into life each time you do it. If we do the walking correctly, we can lengthen our sitting times considerably and deepen your meditation without hurting yourself.

FORMS OF WALKING

It is true that in various other straight Vipassana traditions practiced, walking is looked upon very differently. People may do V E R Y slow walking meditation to emphasize how to notice all of the parts of each movement occurring in the foot as you take each step. Bhante Vimalaramsi was trained in this way originally in Burma (Myanmar) where it could take over 45 minutes to cross a room while performing these extremely slow movements as you attempt to note each movement.

That form of walking is supporting another kind of observation then you will be learning here. It does have value, but in a different way and for a different purpose.

Here, we are taking the observation method up another degree to become even more specific. We are going to walk for the express purpose to discover the impermanence of every arising phenomena we observe in our meditation training. We are going to learn HOW these arising phenomenon actually happen at the point where they first begin: within mind!

SEEING CRAVING

With TWIM practice, our training within the suttas helps us to realize how CRAVING arises, how it causes suffering, and how we can reach a state of cessation of suffering when CRAVING passes away. We learn to

understand everything we do and how it pertains to life as well.

As you follow this training, you will begin to realize that the meditation instructions have the intention of helping you to learn to see more clearly the impersonal process of Dependent Origination, those links which are most obvious, and how to understand the Four Noble Truths and the Three Characteristics in a way that will change your perception of the world.

The most important point of the walking meditation is that "walking" gets the circulation moving in your body for a healthier situation in your legs and sitting position. It rebalances your energy and this helps you gradually to lengthen your sitting times. So the reason for walking a normal pace is really pretty cut and dry.

HOW LONG SITTING?

At Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC) the practice of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) is taught. Whether using the Breath, Loving Kindness, or Forgiveness for our object of the meditation, we follow the same instructions when it comes to Walking.

There are no bells to begin or stop your meditation sessions here. If you are doing an online retreat, we realize you need to follow your daily life working schedule and so you may set times for your sessions that work at your convenience. I always try to plan a retreat online to include two weekends so that you might have space for unlimited sessions during a weekend days.

When doing a personal retreat onsite at the Monastery, there are no interruptions during the day and people are asked to get in between 6-8 hours of meditation during a days schedule. This is not hard to do with the schedule as it is set up. We found out that "there were no bells in the forest" and so it is possible for you to sit as long you wish.

At the center, when more than a few people are on retreat, they join together in one room in the early morning for taking Refuges, Precepts, and reading the Dhammapada together and then they do their first sitting as a group until breakfast time.

Sometimes we may come together for the first sitting after the mid-day meal and rest period to start again for the rest of the day. People sit for whatever length of time they can during other morning and personal afternoon sittings. They come together for evening Dhamma talks 6-8 PM and we discuss questions before their personal evening sitting session happens before bedtime.

Students agree to sit for a minimum of 30 minutes; longer if they can. Then they do the walking meditation or walk on short level paths for 15 to UP TO 45 MINUTES.

HOW TO WALK?

When going to do the walking meditation, a student will slowly rise up out of the sitting meditation and then without a word, begin to walk while keeping the meditation going.

While walking, they continue with their object of meditation, the same as when they were sitting, with their eyes aimed down towards the ground in front of them, about 4 – 6 feet in front of them. They walk at a regular but unhurried pace, NOT TOO SLOWLY. They do not look around to the sides. This is not a nature walk.

At the center we walk on level roads that run through the center in a large circle. OR we might walk in a straight line about 30 feet long back and forth. There are areas set up for just this purpose.

Following this walking meditation, the student goes back to sit down again wherever they wish. This might be under a tree, inside a screened-in tent, or in one of the larger rooms with the AC on if it is really hot. There is a Gazebo with a fan inside too. They could choose to sit on a bench in the open by the gardens or in a Dhamma hall area. The new Meditation Hall will be very nice. Each goes to their own place. It is just as in life.

You will be sitting for however long they can individually sit. Each person develops at their own pace. There is no pressure to keep up with any group here. Each student meets with a guiding teachers one time each day for a check-in. This is the same check-in we use for Group or Online Retreats.

So, this kind of walking meditation may differ from what has been presented for you in some other places. But this is because it is a refined version for a different purpose.

KEEP MEDITATION GOING >>>>

Once you do realize that whatever arises, passes away, I expect you to then watch within your meditation session how mind's attention moves, knowing that whatever arises does indeed pass away without YOU doing anything about it! This is quite an insight by the way. Because of this, there is therefore no reason to leave your object of meditation and begin a different investigation into other thoughts or sensations coming up in your mind. With this knowledge, you can now just let whatever arises to pass away and just stay on track with your observation.

It turns out that during the walking meditation, it's more important to get your blood flowing and your energy up again, especially when you are in a retreat for days on end sitting. The most important part of your retreat is that you can sit longer to observe more closely how impersonally things actually do work.

The rule is, the longer you sit, the longer you should walk! But, keep in mind that it should be a minimum of 15 minutes and a maximum of 45 minutes. Longer than this only leads us to thinking about our surroundings and breaking down our real purpose of discovery.

So this is why we do this natural form of walking to increase our circulation, stretch our muscles, bring up our energy, and come back with more alertness, more awareness.

WHAT'S MIND DOING?

You may wonder now 'what are we doing with our minds as we walk more naturally? The idea is to keep the meditation going while we are moving in life.

Ask yourself. Am I continuing the meditation of the previous sitting, keeping it going, continuing to send out the loving kindness OR is my mind beginning to wander around?

Can we keep on Recognizing when our attention is pulled away and Releasing and Relaxing the tension in our bodies and minds as we walk?

This is what we are learning to do. The answer is, yes, we can!

Another unusual part of this training is that we should be SMILING, continuously while OBSERVING THE MOVEMENTS OF MIND'S ATTENTION MOMENT TO MOMENT EVEN WHILE WE ARE WALKING!

SEEING ANATTA!

One is just walking now instead of sitting, but still, we can stay with our object of the meditation. We can simply continue our meditation and this kind of light observation, as we walk. In this way, the student continues the meditation without a break.

It is good advice to think about WALKING MEDITATION

as being the first step towards integrating

the practice of the meditation into the motion of life.

Why would I put it this way? It is because you are now continuing to observe how mind's attention moves as you are moving in life, and, if you watch carefully you will see that arising thoughts are not as personal as you once thought they were.

As you are moving around, you discover that you can walk to a car, open a door, get some water across the office, or be doing most anything without mind going to other things and still, you can be aware of how mind's attention moves. You are beginning to witness anatta, the impersonal nature of how things work!

Gradually your ability to be just in the present moment will increase. You will begin to RECOGNIZE how Mind wanders off task as you are working and how your tension levels change, and, when this happens, you will begin to RELEASE any arising distraction, RELAX body and mind, SMILE and RETURN to whatever you were doing again and then KEEP going while putting loving kindness into whatever you are doing in life.

This is how we purify mind. This is how we retrain mind, until, one day, we unconsciously begin to let go automatically and all of this happens in a flowing motion. Then, life lightens up and we feel a lot better about everything. It's easier to smile.

SUMMING UP WALKING

To sum up, Walking Meditation helps you to experience how meditation can become integrated into life. It is the first step to keep meditation going all the time. It keeps your circulation going and helps your energy stay up while practicing. The walking meditation is seen here simply as an extension of the sitting meditation, a continuation of the observation we are learning to do. We can return to the cushion refreshed and ready to continue on.

So, this gives you some direction for the walking meditation with this practice of TWIM. I hope will support your experience well.

Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center, Annapolis, Missouri, USA.

Home of the Buddhist American Forest Tradition

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